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*The treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels.*

A

# S E R M O N,

ADDRESSED TO THE CONGREGATION OF

PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,

In W O R C E S T E R,

On TUESDAY, MAY 28, 1782,

A T A

MEETING of MINISTERS,

ASSEMBLED ON ACCOUNT OF

The Rev. JOSEPH GUMMER'S

UNDERTAKING THE PASTORAL CARE OF THAT SOCIETY.

PUBLISHED AT THEIR UNITED REQUEST,

By W. W O O D.

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*William*



TO THE  
REVEREND JOSEPH GUMMER,  
AND TO THE  
CONGREGATION UNDER HIS CARE,  
THE AUTHOR INSCRIBES  
THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE  
AS A  
TESTIMONY OF CORDIAL AFFECTION  
FOR THE  
VALUABLE FRIEND AND COMPANION  
OF HIS  
ACADEMICAL STUDIES,  
AND AS A  
SINCERE THOUGH FEEBLE EXPRESSION  
OF THE  
GRATITUDE WHICH HE FEELS  
FOR THE  
HONOUR WHICH HATH BEEN DONE HIM  
BY A  
VERY RESPECTABLE SOCIETY.

DUDLEY, JULY X, MDCCLXXXII.







## II. CORINTHIANS, IV. 7.

**BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTH-  
EN VESSELS, THAT THE EXCELLENCY  
OF THE POWER MAY BE OF GOD, AND  
NOT OF US.**

**H**UMILITY, my brethren, is one of the most amiable of the christian virtues. There is no character, which it does not become; no office or station, which it does not adorn. When we meet with it in persons of the lowest ranks in life, its suitableness to their circumstances renders it highly pleasing. But when it appears in those, whom Providence hath raised above the common level of mankind, and placed in such situations, as, considering human frailty, lay them under strong temptations to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think—I say, when we see humility in such men, it appears peculiarly

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amiable—it hath charms which cannot be described—it cannot fail of striking every observer, who is capable of receiving impressions from what is excellent and engaging.

And the more exalted the condition of those in whom it is found, the more lovely must it appear, and the greater must its influence be.

Our Lord was the greatest personage that ever appeared amongst men. And his greatness was not founded on those adventitious circumstances, which, according to the common opinion of mankind, raise men to the highest pitch of elevation. He possessed neither the riches nor the honours of this world. No, his preeminence was built upon a more solid foundation. He was the greatest that ever appeared in the human form, because he was the most excellent,—“the Son of GOD—the brightness of His Father’s glory”—and though he was the greatest and most excellent, he was the most humble.

His

His apostles followed the example of their Lord and Master. As far as human imperfection would allow, they copied every part of his temper and conduct, which was designed for their imitation: but there was no particular, in which they copied with greater exactness, than in that, of which I am now speaking.

These apostles were more highly honoured, than ever men had been before them. They were singled out from the rest of mankind, to be the intimate friends, associates and first disciples of the great Redeemer. They were employed in publishing a revelation, which he brought from Heaven—a revelation, in which the immortal interests of their fellow creatures were most highly concerned, and which, if properly received and attended to, would lead them to everlasting happiness and glory. They were endued with miraculous powers to render them equal to this important, honourable and difficult undertaking. As public speakers, they had great popularity and success. Life and Death were, in some instances, subjected to  
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their influence. Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead by their censure, and Dorcas raised to life in answer to their prayers. What amazing powers were these to be possessed by men! That influence, which is derived from human beings, is generally attended with pride and vanity. What then might we not have expected in those who possessed powers so superior; and these, derived immediately from Heaven?—But are there any traces of pride and vanity to be seen in the temper and conduct of the apostles? No, their authority and influence had a very different associate—they were attended by humility.

These highly-favoured men took every opportunity of acknowledging, that, “by the grace of God, they were what they were.” Their language was, “all that we do, is by strength communicated—the truths which we speak, and which have such influence, are not our own—we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord—it is he who caused light to shine out of darkness, who hath shined into  
our

our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ"—we are only the vessels, which contain the important truths of the gospel, and by which they are communicated to others—nor do they derive their efficacy, principally, from the manner in which we speak them—were we to assert this, we should contradict the design with which they are deposited in us; for, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

The modesty, humility, and piety of these declarations are very remarkable. They deserve our serious regard, and are worthy of our imitation. But in none of the passages, already referred to, are these virtues more strongly expressed, or more useful instruction conveyed, than in that, which was last mentioned, and which I have chosen as the subject of this address. In discoursing upon it, I shall consider the view, which it gives us, of the truths of the gospel—the representation, which it contains

ins, of those who are employed in publishing them—and the reason, which it suggests, why such are thus employed. I am to consider.

I. The view which is given us, in the text, of the truths of the gospel.

That these truths are here referred to, is evident. They are the subject, on which the apostle is speaking, and they are mentioned under some appellation, or alluded to, in every preceding verse of the chapter.

In the text he calls them a treasure.

This expression is generally used to denote anything that is valuable, ornamental or costly, and especially, a variety of such things.

Now the truths of the gospel are of the greatest value and truly excellent. What is there in the whole world, that is to be compared with them? They are highly necessary—they are infinitely useful and advantageous—they concern our present peace, and are intimately connected with our everlasting happiness.

They



They are ornamental. All useful knowledge is so, in itself considered; but none in such a degree as that, which is communicated by the truths of the gospel. And these, if they are substantially received, and have their proper influence upon the mind, will exalt and adorn it with real excellence. They will give to the whole man beauties and graces, unspeakably greater, and infinitely more solid and lasting, than those, which are derived from the brightest external ornaments, or the most splendid human acquisitions. Yes, they will clothe him with a robe of righteousness—dress him in the beauties of holiness—assimilate him to the most amiable of all beings—render him the delight of mankind, the joy of Heaven, and fit him for its blessed society.

They may be said to be exceedingly costly. The Almighty has been at a vast expence, if I may be allowed so to speak, in revealing them. He sent his Son from heaven to publish them. In doing this, our Lord endured the greatest hardships, submitted to the greatest indignities,  
and

and he ratified and confirmed them by his own blood.

And, to add no more, they are various.

There is not a circumstance in life, my brethren, to which, we may not find something in them suitable. There is no calamity, to which we are liable, but what the gospel either teaches us to shun, or instructs us how to bear, in such a manner, as will render it, in the end, a real advantage to us. There is not a want, which attends human nature, but what it promises the supply of, as far as it will be best for us; nor a reasonable desire, but what it assures us shall be completely satisfied, if we comply with its dictates, and follow its directions. In short, its truths are the "words of eternal life," and, therefore, justly styled a treasure.

But I hasten to consider,

**H. The representation, which the apostle here makes of those, who are employed in publishing these truths.**

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He calls himself and his fellow-labourers in the gospel, "earthen vessels." Now, as there are some leading circumstances, in which the situation of those who are now engaged in the sacred office, is similar to that of the apostles, I take the liberty of considering this description as extending to them, and shall endeavour to point out the justness and propriety of it. I observe

They are called vessels.

Vessels, we all know, are not such naturally. They are composed of materials, which in their original form, were not fitted for the uses for which, in their present state, they are employed. As vessels, they are the production of some artist or mechanick. And so, with regard to ministers, they do not come into the world qualified for their employ. It is true, some men are naturally formed with such powers and dispositions, as render them more fit to be trained up for this office than others; as some materials are more eligible for the purpose of being formed into vessels than others are. But then, till they are "created anew in Christ  
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Jesus"—have some experimental knowledge of religion;—or, in other words, become sincere christians and truly good men, they are, comparatively speaking, no more fit for this employ, than the oak while it stands in the forest, the ore in the mine, or the clay in its bed, is, to answer the purposes of a vessel. And as these are taken from their natural state, and prepared by the artist, till they are brought to the form, and fitted for the uses of a vessel; so, the faithful ministers of Christ and the gospel, are chosen by Providence, from the rest of mankind, and formed, by human and sacred discipline, for their master's use, and the service of the christian Church.

Vessels are formed for reception. So are ministers. To them are committed the oracles of truth. It is their more immediate business to read and study them—to enter as far as possible into their meaning and design, and endeavour to acquire an accurate and comprehensive acquaintance with them. And if they attend to this important business, with diligence and

and fidelity, they will be favoured with the assistance and blessing of God. As they proceed, the various powers and faculties of their minds will be enlarged—they will be daily filling,—they will be daily enriched more and more from the treasures of the Gospel—they will have clearer, more rational and consistent views of the scheme of redeeming mercy, which is there revealed, a more deep and affecting sense of the obligations which men are under to its benevolent author, be more thoroughly furnished for every good word and work, and more judicious, zealous, and affectionate, and it may be hoped, successful too, in the discharge of their ministerial duties.

Which leads me to observe, that as vessels, so ministers likewise, are designed not for reception only, but for communication also. They are to refund, as it were, that sacred knowledge, which they have acquired—to bring forth out of the treasure of their hearts, and give to every one his portion of meat in due season—to set before sinners those mercies and

terrors of the Lord, which the gospel reveals, to persuade them to repentance—to display its rich provision to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and press its gracious invitations upon them—to hold up to humble, penitent, doubting christians its exceeding great and precious promises, the mercy of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ—to address to wavering professors its powerful motives to steadfastness and consistency—to remind the afflicted christian of the view, which it gives of the trials of life, as to their design, tendency, and glorious issue. In short, they are to shew every sincere follower of Jesus the duties, which the gospel requires of him, the privileges, with which it invests him, and the comforts, which it is calculated to afford him in the present scene, and to remind him of the glorious blessings, which it reveals as the objects of his faith and expectation; the incorruptible inheritance, which is reserved for him in heaven, the mansions of blessedness, which are preparing for his reception, and the unfading crown, which will be placed on his head when he arrives there.

Thus



Thus are ministers to publish those awful, those delightful and persuasive truths, which they have received from the gospel, and the influence of which, they have themselves, we trust, in some measure experienced. They are the vessels, which are formed and employed to receive and communicate this sacred treasure. And they are only vessels. If their minds are richly stored, it is with the truths of Jesus. If they are able to produce things, which are ever so pertinent, the tendency and influence of which, are ever so excellent and powerful, things which gain them reputation and popularity, and render them eminent in their station and extensively useful.—“What have they, which they have not received?”—The best sentiments which they deliver—the most animating doctrines, which they preach, are derived from the instructions of their great master. The brightest minister is only the fullest vessel.

It cannot be denied, indeed, that those who have formed a large acquaintance with the contents of the gospel, and explain them in a judicious and useful manner, must have been diligent

gent in the study of them, and deserve, on this account, esteem and commendation. Yet, even here, boasting is entirely excluded. It is from God that they have received health of body and strength of mind, to enable them to do this; their success is owing to his blessing, and to him the glory of all their usefulness is to be ultimately ascribed. But we quit these thoughts at present and observe

That the apostle calls himself and fellow ministers *earthen* vessels.

And such are ministers now. It is true they are called divines; but they possess, naturally, no superior excellence to other men. Those of them who think soberly, do not pretend to claim it. If this title can be admitted as proper in any view, it must be because the duties which more immediately belong to their office are sacred, and the truths and doctrines which they preach are heavenly and divine.

Yes, my brethren, we would always remember, and would wish you never to forget, that,  
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though the character which we sustain is so important, and the purposes for which we are employed are so valuable, we are only earthen vessels—men of like passions with our brethren of mankind, and who have the same weaknesses and infirmities as attend human nature in common. But on this I need not insist. The proofs of it are many, evident and striking. Permit me, therefore, to proceed and observe, that when the apostle calls himself and his brethren earthen vessels, if he does not mean to glance at, at least it may lead us to reflect on—the meanness of their circumstances.

Those who were immediately appointed to the ministerial office by our Lord, were in general poor. And indeed, many circumstances shew the propriety of employing those, in the first propagation of the gospel, who were not encumbered with the anxieties, which usually attend extensive possessions. And the world took care that their successors should not be incommoded with riches. It is true, in later times, when christianity came to  
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be patronized by the civil power, mankind ran into the opposite, and far more dangerous extreme; yet still, there are some sects, amongst those into which christians are divided, in which the provision made for the support of the ministerial office, is generally slender and inadequate. But notwithstanding this, and all the difficulties with which they have struggled, in their worldly circumstances, many of those, who have exercised the sacred function in such connections, have served their master faithfully—have passed through the world with great reputation and usefulness—and with more comfort too, than their situation seemed outwardly to promise—and what hath amply compensated for all the hardships which they have experienced, when they have come to the closing scenes of life, though they have not had so much as the widow's mite to leave behind them, rich in the treasures of a good conscience and hope, they have been able to say as Paul did, “henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.”

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But the apostle might mean to hint, in using the term we are now considering, at the low estimation in which he and his fellow-labourers were held, by the world in general.

Earthen vessels, you know, at least those which are commonly called such, though necessary and useful, are but little valued. They are generally set in places where they are much exposed to injury, and often thrown about by the most unworthy hands. And did not the contemptuous treatment, which the apostles met with, bear some resemblance to this? Have not ministers, since their time, been despised? Hath not their office been made the subject of ridicule? Have they not been persecuted, and in many instances driven from place to place without mercy? Have they not, for some supposed flaw in their sentiments, some common frailty in their conduct, or even some innocent gratification, been rudely handled by the lowest in their flocks—and almost, if not quite—broken in pieces?

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But I need not dwell on these unpleasing thoughts before this assembly. I am happy, my friends, that I can congratulate your minister, and the rest of my reverend brethren, that we live in a period, and preside in societies, in which the ministerial character is more honoured and respected.

I only add, that the *frailty* of ministers seems evidently denoted by the apostle's representation in the text.

Earthen vessels are much in use, and exceedingly liable, from their nature, to be broken. And ministers, though they preach the living truths of the everlasting gospel, are themselves frail dying creatures. Their vessels, which should contain such sacred treasure, in a few years, fall to pieces and are laid in the dust. The duties of their office have a natural tendency to wear them out. They may be half broken, perhaps, many years before they are quite destroyed. As a vessel, which the owner uses long after it is shattered, but expects



expects that every time he takes it up, it will fall to pieces in his hands, so ministers often labour amidst growing infirmities and increasing indispositions, for a considerable time, and in every attempt of service, are ready to suspect that it will be the last.

May we ever remember, brethren, and be deeply impressed with a sense of our frailty. May we daily consider how liable our services are to interruption, and what a variety of disorders and calamities we are subject to, which may render us incapable of performing the duties of our office, and lay us aside as broken vessels, or send us to the grave. May we preach as those who will in a little while speak, and you hear, as those who will e'er long attend upon our instructions no more. May we and you remember the solemn account which we must respectively give to God. And, what will crown our wishes, and compleat the happiness of both, may we give up this account with joy. Then though these earthen vessels should be worn out in your service, long before

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they reach the common standard of human life, your ministers will reflect upon their labours with inexpressible pleasure, and find them gloriously rewarded.

Let me now proceed and consider,

III. The reason, which the apostle suggests, why such are thus employed. And that is, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of them. This may lead us to remark,

That the gospel is powerful.

This will appear, if we consider, that it is not a cunningly devised fable, but a system of truth. And truth hath a natural weight and force. If it be understood, and left to operate freely, it must of course have a considerable influence upon the mind. But the gospel contains truths of the greatest importance—truths, in which, as we have already said, the present and everlasting felicity of mankind is interested—truths, which were revealed from heaven—published by the Son of God—confirmed by

a number of public, incontestible and benevolent miracles—illustrated, and in part reduced to practice, in his amiable, spotless and useful life, and sealed by his own blood.

Now is it not natural to suppose that such truths, thus published and attested, are peculiarly well calculated to impress and affect the minds of men? Indeed we have the testimony of the gospel itself to prove that they are so. The evangelist Luke tells us that when our Lord preached, “the people were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power.” And this was not owing merely to the energy with which it was delivered; for the apostle declares that, “the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

The writers of the gospel history relate many instances, in which its power was apparent and striking, at its first publication; and those effects which it still produces, where  
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it is cordially received and chearfully submitted to, are incontestible proofs of the strength of its operation.

But I observe,

Its power is excellent. It operates in an excellent manner, and produces excellent effects.

It operates in an excellent manner. It acts upon us in an entire conformity to our natures as reasonable creatures, and in a perfect consistency with the exercise of our intellectual powers and faculties. The gospel does not impel us to act in this, or that manner, we know not why—but convinces our judgments of the propriety of what it urges to do—its relation to the great end which God has in view respecting us, and its fitness to promote it—and then suggests motives, makes promises and sets before us prospects, to touch the springs of action, and lead us to comply with its reasonable dictates.

And it is to be remembered, that its power, though great, is by no means irresistible. Were it  
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it so, it does not appear (to the preacher at least) how there could be any virtue in obeying its precepts, or any promises of reward consistently made to those who yield themselves up to its influence. And, on the other hand, all threatenings denounced against those who reject the counsel of God against themselves, or resist the influence of the gospel, would be vain and nugatory; because, on this supposition, no such crime could be committed. Again

The power of the gospel is excellent, as it produces excellent effects. This part of the subject, my brethren, is peculiarly interesting. What a pleasing scene—what an extensive and delightful field for contemplation is here presented to our view! Some of its most striking objects we have already noticed, when speaking of the influence of the gospel in adorning the human mind. Where men yield themselves up to this influence, it not only subdues the power of sin in the heart, and restrains every irregular propensity, but, as we have said, it excites holy, pious and heavenly dispositions there

there—it forms them to the resemblance of God,—it adorns them with the spirit and virtues of Jesus,—it renders them good and useful members of the community at large—tender and affectionate in every domestick relation—honest and upright in all their intercourse with mankind—blessings to the neighbourhoods in which they reside, and as far as their influence extends—a credit to the religious societies to which they belong—an honour to Christ and his cause, and the glory and ornament of human nature.

By the power of the gospel, its advocates are assisted in the discharge of every duty—they are supported under their afflictions—they are animated to oppose their difficulties and temptations with vigour and resolution—they are aided in their endeavours to advance in spiritual improvement, and they are helped to maintain a happy superiority to the world, to set their affections on things above, and to have their conversation in heaven. And I am happy to add, that it fortifies them against the fear of death



death, sustains them under the stroke of this last enemy, and often enables them to quit every earthly friend and earthly enjoyment, with composure and joy, in hope of superior connections and a better inheritance.

Such is the power of the gospel—these are some of its effects—and surely they are sufficient to prove that it is excellent. Allow me to observe,

That this power and the excellency of it are of God.

As God is the author of the gospel, all the influence which it has—the manner in which it operates—and the effects which it produces may justly be ascribed to him. This is true upon the supposition that the apostle refers only to the influence which it has, as a system of divine truth. But I apprehend that he rather alludes, here, to the additional and miraculous energy with which it was attended at its first publication. Such an energy certainly accompanied the preaching of the apostles. I might

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lead you to consider their successes as a proof of it. Multitudes were converted to the christian faith in one day—and even by one discourse. I might mention also, in this view, its rapid and extensive progress in the world, notwithstanding the various and powerful enemies by which it was opposed. Then indeed the excellency of the power of the gospel was, most evidently, of God.

And though such miraculous influence hath ceased, allow me to think, that if we consider the representations, which scripture gives us of the nature and perpetuity of the office of the holy Spirit, and the necessity and power of its operation, in rendering the truths and doctrines of christianity, effectual to the great purposes of real and improving holiness, we shall find reason to believe, that its common influences are still exerted—that a divine energy now attends the preaching of the gospel—that the effects which it has upon those who properly regard it, are far beyond what the natural force of truth would produce; and that the excellency

lency of its power is, in this sense, of God. To ascribe it, therefore, to those who preach the gospel would be unscriptural and absurd. It would contradict the express design with which they are fixed upon for this employment. For the apostle leads us to observe,

██████████ lastly. That the treasure of the gospel was deposited in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power might be, and appear to be, of God and not of them.

And, my brethren, is not this purpose fully answered by such an appointment? When the truths which are spoken by such frail, imperfect and fallible beings make such important and happy alterations in the tempers, lives and conditions of men—and when they produce effects, so powerful, excellent and lasting, must they not plainly appear to be more than the words of those who preach them?—must it not be evident that the power which attends them is of God, and not of those by whom they are delivered? Were they preached by angels would this be so



apparent as it is at present? In all probability, the excellency of the power, which accompanies them, would then be ascribed to these heavenly messengers—men would suppose that the happy effects produced were owing to the exalted beings who dispensed them—God would be in a great measure forgotten, and his glory given to others.

It may be thought, however, that if such superior beings were employed in the christian ministry, it would be more regarded—that to hear angels speak all would crowd to our churches—that then, there would be no careless and negligent hearers—none to cavil and find fault—none that were discontented, unsettled and roving in our congregations—but that all would be steady and attentive—all delighted and improved by their respective teachers.

But allow me to say, that this appears very doubtful. You all remember the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The former, you know, when he lifted up his eyes in torments, and felt the dreadful consequences of his folly,  
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pride and sensuality—seeing Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom—that Lazarus whom he had suffered to starve at his gate unrelieved, and unpitied—he requested that he might be sent to his surviving brethren, to warn them of their approaching fate, and induce them to avoid that wretchedness into which he had plunged himself. Now what reply does our Lord, who was intimately acquainted with human nature, represent the patriarch as making to this request? “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” And can it be supposed that an angel would have better success than such a preacher as this—one newly risen from the dead—and fraught with all the awful eloquence which the recent view of a fellow creature under the torments of the infernal world, could inspire? No, alas! were angels to preach, they would soon become familiar—men would not, even then, be all hearers—and of those who were, all would not be attentive, serious and obedient.

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The appointment of our fellow-men to preach to us the truths of the gospel is a scheme in which there is great wisdom and propriety. To hear one of our own species, who sincerely wishes our welfare at present and for ever—who has the same hopes and fears, and the same interest in what he delivers with ourselves—to hear such a one address to us the truths of the gospel, and recommend them to our attention, from a full conviction that if we yield ourselves up to their influence, they will be the power of God to our salvation—and display its blessings, and from his own experience of their value, their excellency and suitableness to our circumstances, as sinful creatures, urge our regards to them, and persuade us, by every moving argument which the gospel suggests, to seek an interest in them—surely this is admirably calculated to engage our serious regard to what is delivered to us, and to impress it upon our minds.

But, at the same time, we are so sensible of the imperfection of those who thus address  
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us, and the need which they have of divine influences to render the truths which they preach effectual to the improvement of their own hearts; as that, if we derive any benefit from them, we must see the most convincing reason to believe, what this appointment was intended to shew;

That the excellency of the power is of God, and not of them.

In short, my brethren, many advantages seem to result from the appointment of which we are speaking. The gospel is preached by such means as have a natural tendency to interest us—God who is the author of it hath ultimately all the glory of its effects—and at the same time its credit is established, and the faith and comfort of the christian promoted. For when he sees that it is the power of God with which it is attended, he will be fully convinced of the divine authority of Christ, and conclude, that it is the word of eternal truth; being well persuaded that the ever true and faithful God  
would

would never deceive his creatures by giving such sanctions to falsehood and imposture.

Thus I have finished the plan which I proposed to pursue in discoursing upon this subject. Permit me to address a few exhortations to you, founded upon the several parts of it, with which I shall conclude. And

First. Is the gospel such a treasure? let me intreat you, brethren, to be thankful for it.

It is not concealed in an unknown language—it is not locked up from you in the bosoms of those who are employed to preach it. No, you have it in your own hands—you have opportunities of reading—you have helps for studying it, learning its meaning and design, and enriching and adorning your minds with the truths which it contains. And to be favoured with a system of truth and doctrine of such high original—revealed by such means—attested by such evidence—a system which makes such important discoveries—opens such sources of consolation and hope—is attended with

with such influences, and calculated to produce such blessed effects! What an unspeakable mercy! O, sirs, be grateful for it. Esteem it above all that you possess. It is of more worth than all the riches of the Indies, or the treasures of a world. Prize it as you do your lives; for it is from the influence of this, and the present satisfactions and future expectations which it inspires, that your existence derives its greatest value. Again

If the gospel is such a treasure, be often looking it over.

Had we diamonds of immense value laid up, should not we often visit them, examine them and entertain ourselves with remarking their number, variety and lustre? And is the gospel a treasure, which infinitely surpasses all that this earth can yield, and shall we not examine that? Has God sent, has his son brought us this treasure from heaven, and shall we let it lie by neglected, and seldom or never look into it? What astonishing folly and ingratitude would this be! May such folly—

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may



—may such ingratitude, my brethren, never be laid to our charge! God forbid that it should make an article in our future account!

Further, let us be thankful for the gospel ministry and that God hath appointed our fellow-men to this office—an appointment so admirably well calculated to display his power, wisdom and goodness. Let us solicit, and depend upon him, to render the reading and preaching of the truths of Jesus effectual to the great and glorious purposes for which they were revealed, our instruction, our improvement, our comfort and everlasting salvation. And whatever benefit we derive from these means, let us ascribe to God all the glory and all the praise.

Finally, let the representation, which we have been considering, of those who are employed to preach the gospel, direct and influence you, my brethren, in your conduct towards them.

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You will allow, I trust, that the purposes for which they are employed are important, and their office respectable. It justly claims, therefore, your regard. And if those who sustain it, discharge it faithfully, and exert their best abilities to answer the great ends of it, and thus promote your highest interests—though they ask no adulation—though they disclaim—though they scorn all superstitious veneration—yet they are warranted to expect that you “esteem them highly, in love, for their works sake.”

As earthen vessels, they claim your tenderness. When we consider, my brethren, the importance of the work in which we are engaged, and our own frailty, weakness and imperfection, we are deeply sensible that we need, and we trust, you will not refuse us, your candour and forbearance.

Remember that, though earthen vessels, we can feel. The nature of our education and office is such, as has a tendency to induce a

peculiar degree of sensibility. Even the dim eye of indifference will give us pain. The averted glance of contempt, like the Parthian, wounds us as it recedes. All disrespect, and especially all captiousness and malevolence, will damp the ardour of our spirits, spoil our pleasures, and render our work heavy and heartless. Your friendly support, my brethren, is at all times necessary; and there are some circumstances, in which we stand in peculiar need of your countenance and encouragement. When first entering upon our office—or when called to stations of greater importance and more enlarged duty—especially if we follow those of engaging manners and distinguished abilities—in these cases, there are many fears and apprehensions, which tremble about our hearts, and give us inexpressible pain. These, it is yours to endeavour to allay and dissipate.

We ask you to second our attempts of usefulness. Do this, we intreat you, by a constant, serious and diligent attendance upon our public services, and by your daily and fervent prayers



prayers for our success. We earnestly urge upon you, by every consideration of duty, interest and affection, the request of the apostle, "brethren pray for us that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified," by producing its happiest effects upon your own hearts, and the hearts of others. Assist us by your pious instructions—your seasonable admonitions—and your edifying examples. You, who stand at the head of families, may do much to help us, by these means, amongst those under your care, and the younger members of the society, to which you belong. Let your houses be nurseries for the church—nurseries for heaven. Walk before them "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." As united in christian fellowship, we beseech and exhort you all by the Lord Jesus—and we trust you will suffer the word of exhortation—that while ye remember those with tenderness and affection who are set over you in the Lord, ye would continue to be at peace among yourselves. "Let no root of bitterness, springing up, trouble you." Watch over and exhort one another  
daily

daily. Aim to provoke one another to love and to good works. Strive—and let that be the only strife amongst you—strive who shall make the most rapid advances in goodness—who shall most eminently adorn his profession, serve the cause of his great master on earth, and be the earliest ripe for the business and enjoyments of heaven. In a word, “be ye steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord.”

And to induce you to this, allow me to mention, as a motive—and it is a motive, which, I am persuaded, will have some weight with you—that there is nothing will encourage and animate us more in our duty as ministers, (except the testimony of a good conscience and a sense of the divine approbation,) than to see you thus improving in goodness, steady and active in the service of our great Lord, and ornaments to his religion. Yes—“we live brethren, if ye stand fast in the Lord.” Though we die away in your service, our comforts, as your pastors will live—they will live in affliction  
they

they will live even in death itself—they will survive the grave—we shall feel them at the bar of Jesus. “For what is our joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory—ye are our joy.” And to meet you, the people of our charge—you whose interests have lain so near our hearts, and for whose happiness we have so assiduously laboured and fervently prayed—to meet you amongst the disciples of Jesus at his awful tribunal and see you accepted there—what a joy will that be! O deny us not—give us this joy we beseech you. You cannot afford us a more solid proof of your friendship and affection. If then we are so happy as to find mercy of the Lord ourselves in that day—let us see you in the number of his friends—let us have you to enter with us into his joy—let us have you for our associates in the services and pleasures of eternity.

Be assured that there is nothing will give us equal satisfaction, especially if we have reason  
to



to believe that we have been instrumental in training you up for it, unless it be our own share in this felicity.



**THE END.**

